Errors in the King James Bible – Original title : Some Reasons Why Humanists Reject The Bible

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Introduction

Humanists reject the claim that the Bible is the word of God. They are convinced the book was written solely by humans in an ignorant, superstitious, and cruel age. They believe that because the writers of the Bible lived in an unenlightened era, the book contains many errors and harmful teachings.

Humanists receive much criticism due to their position on the Bible. Some critics even accuse them of being evil. This article attempts to clarify the reasons why Humanists hold negative views about the Bible.

Importance of the Subject

In the United States, the Bible is often hailed as a divinely inspired book. Television and radio carry religious programs praising the Bible as the holy and infallible word of God. Religious groups also distribute vast amounts of books, magazines, tapes, pamphlets, and other items. The materials promote the idea that, as televangelist Pat Robertson has said, "The Bible . . . is a workable guidebook for politics, business, families and all the affairs of mankind." [1]

The Bible is also extolled by many politicians. For instance, President Ronald Reagan signed into law an Act of Congress proclaiming 1983 to be the "Year of the Bible." The law described the Bible as the "Word of God" and said there is "a national need to study and apply its teachings." [2]

Thousands of other religious and political leaders throughout the U.S. promote the Bible. In most communities, an opposing view is rarely, if ever, heard.

The massive and incessant promotion of the Bible significantly influences the beliefs of millions. A Gallup poll showed that over 30% of Americans believe that the Bible is the word of God and its teachings should be taken literally. [3] Gallup identified an additional 25% of Americans who consider the Bible as inspired by God, but think some verses should be interpreted symbolically rather than literally. [4]

Gallup says many other people, while having doubts about whether the entire Bible is the word of God, still consider the book to be a source of moral truths and regard its teachings as deserving great respect. [5]

Such views about the Bible are surely responsible, at least in part, for Gallup's finding that over two-thirds of Americans belong to churches or synagogues, and 40% attend services on a weekly basis. [6]

If the Humanist view of the Bible is correct, millions of Bible-believers and churchgoers are wasting much time, money, and energy. Humanity's condition could be greatly improved if those resources were used for solving the world's problems instead of worshiping a nonexistent God.

Moreover, because so many people have been told the Bible is the "Good Book," biblical teachings shape the attitudes of millions on numerous subjects. When the subjects involve governmental issues, all of society can be affected when Bible-believers express their views in the political arena.

Anyone who becomes politically active can soon discover that Bible teachings influence the opinions of many Americans on issues involving nuclear war, overpopulation, conservation, women's rights, gay rights, racial equality, corporal punishment of children, church-state separation, sex education, science, abortion, contraception, censorship, capital punishment, and other subjects.

When people view the Bible as the word of a just and omniscient God, and attempt to have society's laws and social practices reflect biblical teachings, serious error and harm will occur if the Bible was actually written by fallible humans who lived in an unenlightened era.

In that case, the Bible would not be a guidebook for attaining human happiness and well-being. It would instead perpetuate the ideas of an ignorant and superstitious past – and prevent humanity from rising to a higher level.

Contradictions

The Bible is an unreliable authority because it contains numerous contradictions. Logically, if two statements are contradictory, at least one of them is false. The biblical contradictions therefore prove that the book has many false statements and is not infallible.

Examples of Old Testament Contradictions

The contradictions start in the opening chapters of the Bible, where inconsistent creation stories are told. Genesis chapter 1 says the first man and woman were made at the same time, and after the animals. But Genesis chapter 2 gives a different order of creation: man, then the animals, and then woman.

Genesis chapter 1 lists six days of creation, whereas chapter 2 refers to the "day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens." Genesis 1:2-3 claims that God created light and divided it from darkness on the first day; but Genesis 1:14-19 tells us the sun, moon, and stars weren't made until the fourth day.

Chapter 1 reports that the fruit trees were created before the man, while chapter 2 indicates they were made after him. Genesis 1:20 says the fowl were created out of the waters; Genesis 2:19 alleges they were formed from the ground.

Contradictions are also seen in the biblical story of a worldwide flood. According to Genesis 6:19-22, God ordered Noah to bring "of every living thing of all flesh, two of every sort . . . into the ark." Nevertheless, Genesis 7:2-3 relates that the Lord ordered Noah to take into the ark the clean beasts and the birds by sevens, and only the unclean beasts by twos.

Genesis 8:4 reports that, as the waters of the flood receded, Noah's ark rested on the mountains of Ararat in the seventh month. The very next verse, however, says the mountaintops could not be seen until the tenth month.

Genesis 8:13 describes the earth as being dry on the first day of the first month. But Genesis 8:14 informs us the earth was not dry until the twenty-seventh day of the second month.

The Old Testament contains an interesting contradiction in the story of the census taken by King David and the resulting punishment of the Israelites. God was so angered by the census that he sent a plague that killed 70,000 men. According to II Samuel 24:1, the Lord had caused David to take the census – which makes the punishment appear even more nonsensical. But an attempt was later made, at I Chronicles 21:1, to improve God's image by claiming that Satan incited the census.

Further, the Old Testament is contradictory as to whether the Lord commanded the Israelites to sacrifice animals to him. At Jeremiah 7:22, God denies he ever gave the Israelites commandments about animal sacrifices. In contrast, Exodus 29:38-42 and many other verses depict God as requiring the Israelites to offer animal sacrifices.

Examples of New Testament Contradictions

In the New Testament, there are contradictions between the genealogies of Jesus given in the first chapter of Matthew and the third chapter of Luke.

Both genealogies begin with Jesus' father, who is identified as Joseph (which is curious, given that Mary was supposedly impregnated by the Holy Ghost). But Matthew says Joseph's father was Jacob, while Luke claims he was Heli. Matthew lists 26 generations between Jesus and King David, whereas Luke records 41. Matthew runs Jesus' line of descent through David's son Solomon, while Luke has it going through David's son Nathan.

The story of Jesus' birth is also contradictory. Matthew 2:13-15 depicts Joseph and Mary as fleeing to Egypt with the baby Jesus immediately after the wise men from the east had brought gifts.

But Luke 2:22-40 claims that after the birth of Jesus, his parents remained in Bethlehem for the time of Mary's purification (which was 40 days, under the Mosaic law). Afterwards, they brought Jesus to Jerusalem "to present him to

the Lord," and then returned to their home in Nazareth. Luke mentions no journey into Egypt or visit by wise men from the east.

Concerning the death of Judas, the disloyal disciple, Matthew 27:5 states he took the money he had received for betraying Jesus, threw it down in the temple, and "went and hanged himself." To the contrary, Acts 1:18 claims Judas used the money to purchase a field and "falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out."

In describing Jesus being led to his execution, John 19:17 recounts that he carried his own cross. But Mark 15:21-23 disagrees by saying a man called Simon carried the cross.

As for the crucifixion, Matthew 27:44 tells us Jesus was taunted by both criminals who were being crucified with him. But Luke 23:39-43 relates that only one of the criminals taunted Jesus, the other criminal rebuked the one who was doing the taunting, and Jesus told the criminal who was defending him, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise."

Regarding the last words of Jesus while on the cross, Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34 quote Jesus as crying with a loud voice, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Luke 23:46 gives his final words as, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." John 19:30 alleges the last words were, "It is finished."

There are even contradictions in the accounts of the resurrection – the supposed event that is the very foundation of the Christian religion. Mark 16:2 states that on the day of the resurrection, certain women arrived at the tomb at the rising of the sun. But John 20:1 informs us they arrived when it was yet dark. Luke 24:2 describes the tomb as open when the women arrived, whereas Matthew 28:1-2 indicates it was closed. Mark 16:5 declares that the women saw a young man at the tomb, Luke 24:4 says they saw two men, Matthew 28:2 reports they saw an angel, and John 20:11-12 claims they saw two angels.

Also in the resurrection stories, there are contradictions as to the identity of the women who came to the tomb,[7] whether the men or angels the women saw were inside or outside the tomb,[8] whether the men or angels were standing or sitting,[9] and whether Mary Magdalene recognized the risen Jesus when he first appeared to her.[10]

As a final example of a New Testament contradiction, the conflicting accounts of Paul's conversion can be cited. Acts 9:7 states that when Jesus called Paul to preach the gospel, the men who were with Paul heard a voice but saw no man. According to Acts 22:9, however, the men saw a light but didn't hear the voice speaking to Paul.

The foregoing examples are just a few of the hundreds of contradictions contained in the Old and New Testaments. Each contradiction is an instance where at least one of the verses is wrong. Thus, hundreds of contradictions mean there are at least hundreds of incorrect statements in the Bible.

Cruelties

Humanists also reject the Bible because it approves of outrageous cruelty and injustice. In civilized legal systems, a fundamental principle is that the suffering of the innocent is the essence of injustice. Yet the Bible teaches that God repeatedly violated this moral precept by harming innocent people.

Cruelty in Basic Christian Teachings

Instances of cruel and unjust behavior by the biblical God are seen in the most basic Christian doctrines. Some of God's acts that harmed the innocent are as follows.

He damned the whole human race and cursed the entire creation because of the acts of two people (Genesis 3:16-23; Romans 5:18); he drowned pregnant women and innocent children and animals at the time of the Flood (Genesis 7:20-23); he tormented the Egyptians and their animals with hail and disease because pharaoh refused to let the Israelites leave Egypt (Exodus 9:8-11,25); and he killed Egyptian babies at the time of the Passover (Exodus 12:29-30).

After the Exodus he ordered the Israelites to exterminate the men, women, and children of seven nations and steal their land (Deuteronomy 7:1-2); he killed King David's baby because of David's adultery with Bathsheba (II Samuel 12:13-

18); he required the torture and murder of his own son (e.g., Romans 3:24-25); and he promised to send non-Christians to eternal torture (e.g., Revelation 21:8).

More Slaughters Ordered by the Lord

Besides the unfairness and heartlessness contained in many well-known Christian teachings, the Bible has other violent tales that are opposed to civilized standards of morality. Among the most shocking Bible passages are those that portray God as ordering or approving the extermination of various people, including children and the elderly. Here are examples:

- At I Samuel 15:3, the prophet Samuel gives King Saul this commandment from the Lord: "Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass."
- Ezekiel 9:4-7 has this harrowing account: "And the Lord said unto him, Go through . . . the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof. And to the others he said in mine hearing, Go ye after him through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity: Slay utterly old and young, both maids and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom is the mark. . . ."
- Hosea 13:16 describes a punishment from the Lord: "Samaria shall become desolate; for she hath rebelled against her God: they shall fall by the sword: their infants shall be dashed in pieces, and their women with child shall be ripped up."
- Deuteronomy 32:23-25 says that after the Israelites incited God's jealousy by worshiping other gods, he vowed: "I will spend mine arrows upon them. . . . The sword without, and terror within, shall destroy both the young man and the virgin, the suckling also with the man of gray hairs."
- In Numbers chapter 31, the Lord approves of these instructions that Moses gave to the Israelite soldiers about how to treat certain women and children captured in war: "Now therefore kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman that hath known man by lying with him. But all the women children, that have not known a man by lying with him, keep alive for yourselves."
- Isaiah 13:9,15-18 contains this message from God: "Behold, the day of the Lord cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger. . . . Every one that is found shall be thrust through. . . . Their children also shall be dashed to pieces before their eyes . . . and their wives ravished. Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them. . . . [T]hey shall have no pity on the fruit of the womb; their eyes will not spare children."

These verses expose the biblical God as having the morals of a sociopathic mass murderer.

Examples of God's Other Cruel Methods

The God of the Bible displayed his sadistic tendencies by employing a variety of other means to torment and kill people.

He caused the earth to open and swallow entire families (Numbers 16:37-32); he used fire to devour people (e.g., Leviticus 10:1-2; Numbers 11:1-2); and he punished the Israelites with wars, famines, and pestilences (e.g., Ezekiel 5:11-17).

He sent wild animals such as bears (II Kings 2:23-24), lions (II Kings 17:24-25), and serpents (Numbers 21:6) to attack people; he sanctioned slavery (e.g., Leviticus 25:44-46); he ordered religious persecution (e.g., Deuteronomy 13:12-16); and he caused cannibalism (Jeremiah 19:9).

Disproportionate Punishments by the Lord

The biblical God is also guilty of inflicting punishments that are grossly disproportionate to the acts committed. In the American legal system, such disproportion violates the U.S. Constitution's Eighth Amendment, which prohibits cruel and unusual punishments.

Obviously, to punish people who are completely innocent, as seen in the preceding Bible verses, constitutes punishment that is horribly disproportionate to the moral culpability of the recipients. And there are other instances where the biblical God's punishments are shockingly harsh compared to the acts committed.

For example, the Old Testament says the Lord prescribed execution for the "crimes" of working on the Sabbath (Exodus 31:15); cursing one's parents (Leviticus 20:9); worshiping other gods (Deuteronomy 17:2-5); enticing a friend or family member to worship other gods (Deuteronomy 13:6-10); being a witch, medium, or wizard (Exodus 22:18; Leviticus 20:27); engaging in homosexual acts (Leviticus 20:13); and not being a virgin on one's wedding night (Deuteronomy 22:20-21).

In the New Testament, God became far worse in regard to imposing excessively severe punishments. It would be hard to imagine anything more cruel and disproportionate than punishing people with eternal torture for mere disbelief that Jesus was the son of God.

The inability to believe that proposition harms no one, and it has been disbelieved by some of the greatest benefactors of humanity. Nonetheless, God promises to punish them and all other nonbelievers with the most horrible pain conceivable.

God's Violence Incites Human Violence

A serious problem with the violence and injustice in the Bible is that, all too often, the teachings and example of the biblical God have incited cruel acts by his followers.

Many of them reasoned that since God, who is considered just and loving, committed or approved of the most brutal acts, good Christians need not have qualms about behaving likewise. Such logic led the American patriot Thomas Paine to say, "The belief in a cruel god makes a cruel man."[11]

Joseph McCabe's treatise The History of Torture illustrates the reasoning process. McCabe reports that during the Middle Ages, there was more torture used in Christian Europe than in any society in history.[12]

The main cause of this cruelty was the Christian doctrine of eternal punishment. McCabe explains: "If, it was natural to reason, God punishes men with eternal torment, it is surely lawful for men to use doses of it in a good cause."[13]

Other historical examples of violent and unjust acts supported by biblical teachings include: the Inquisition; the Crusades; the burning of witches; religious wars; pogroms against Jews; persecution of homosexuals; forceful conversions of heathens; slavery; beatings of children; brutal treatment of the mentally ill; suppression of scientists; and whippings, mutilations, and violent executions of persons convicted of crimes. Those acts were a regular part of the Christian world for centuries.

Thomas Paine was entirely justified in saying about the Bible: "It is a history of wickedness that has served to corrupt and brutalize mankind; and, for my part, I sincerely detest it as I detest everything that is cruel."[14]

Teachings Inconsistent with the Laws of Nature

Many of the Bible's claims are inconsistent with the laws of nature. Humanists believe that those claims are both wrong and harmful.

Science and the Laws of Nature

As a result of human observation and experience, a fundamental principle of science is that the laws of nature do not change, cannot be violated, and have acted uniformly over time. According to paleontologist Stephen J. Gould, this uniformity or constancy of natural laws is the "methodological assumption" making science practicable.[15]

Indeed, without the assumption that the physical world operates according to unchanging natural laws, there would be no use studying the world, conducting experiments, or otherwise learning from experience.

In a world not operating under unvarying natural laws, those acts would be useless because knowledge of past events would not provide guidance about what will happen in similar situations in the future. There would always be the possibility of supernatural forces intervening to alter outcomes from what would otherwise be expected to occur based on past experience.

Overwhelming evidence shows that physical events occur according to immutable natural laws. And an increasing knowledge of those laws enhances humankind's ability to predict future events and control human destiny.

The Bible and Supernatural Events

By claiming that supernatural beings intervene in the world, the Bible opposes the scientific principle of natural laws operating uniformly and unvaryingly. As a result, the Bible discourages a scientific approach to problems.

The Bible has stories about a talking snake (Genesis 3:4-5); a tree bearing fruit which, when eaten, gives knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:17; 3:5-7); another tree whose fruit bestows immortality (Genesis 3:22); a voice coming from a burning bush (Exodus 3:4); a talking donkey (Numbers 22:28); rods turning into serpents (Exodus 7:10-12); water changing into blood (Exodus 7:19-22); water coming from a rock (Numbers 20:11); a dead man reviving when his corpse touched the bones of a prophet (II Kings 13:21); and other people rising from the dead (e.g., I Kings 17:21-22; II Kings 4:32-35; Acts 9:37-40).

There are also accounts of the sun standing still (Joshua 10:13); the parting of a sea (Exodus 14:21-22); iron floating (II Kings 6:5-6); the sun's shadow going back ten degrees (II Kings 20:9-11); a witch bringing the ghost of Samuel back from the dead (I Samuel 28:3-15); disembodied fingers writing on a wall (Daniel 5:5); a man living for three days and nights in the belly of a fish (Jonah 1:17); people walking on water (Matthew 14:26-29); a virgin impregnated by God (Matthew 1:20); a pool of water that can cure ailments of those who dip in it (John 5:2-4); and angels and demons influencing earthly affairs (e.g., Acts 5:19; Luke 11:24-26).

These biblical myths support the belief, which has been held by primitive and illiterate people throughout history, that supernatural beings frequently and arbitrarily intervene in this world.

When examined in the light of experience and reason, the Bible's claims about supernatural occurrences do not warrant belief. Our experience is that the natural world operates according to principles of regularity – which are never violated. We also know from experience that many people are often mistaken or dishonest. Thus, it's far more likely the Bible writers either erred or lied than the laws of nature were violated.

Harms of the Supernatural Outlook

Because of believing that supernatural beings control the world, people have often misdirected their energies in attempting to solve problems. Instead of studying the world to discover scientific solutions to problems, they performed religious activities in an effort to obtain the assistance of benevolent supernatural beings or thwart the influence of malicious ones.

This misdirection of energies is seen, for instance, in the history of the attempts to prevent the outbreak and spread of diseases in Europe. The historian Andrew White relates that, during many centuries in the Middle Ages, the filthiness of European cities repeatedly caused great plagues that sent multitudes to their graves.[16]

Based on biblical teachings, Christian theologians during those centuries thought the plagues were caused by the anger of God or the malevolence of Satan.[17] The Bible gave them ample support for their belief. It contains numerous instances of God punishing people by means of pestilence (e.g., Exodus 32:35; Numbers 16:44-49; Jeremiah 21:6). And in describing Jesus' healing miracles, the New Testament attributes the following afflictions to demons: blindness (Matthew 12:22); muteness (Matthew 9:32-33); lameness (Luke 13:11,16); epilepsy (Matthew 17:14-18); and insanity (Mark 5:1-13).

Those teachings led the early church leaders to promote the idea that demonic activity is the primary cause of disease. For example, St. Augustine, whose views strongly influenced Western thought for over a thousand years, said in the fourth century: "All diseases of Christians are to be ascribed to these demons. . . ."[18]

With the coming of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century, there was little change in the Christian attitude toward the causes of disease. Martin Luther, the founder of Protestantism, repeatedly attributed his own illnesses to "devils' spells." He also stated: "Satan produces all the maladies which afflict mankind, for he is the prince of death."[19]

As a result of believing in supernatural causes of disease, theologians taught that plagues could be averted or stopped by seeking supernatural assistance. And the way to obtain God's help, they thought, was to perform religious acts. These included repenting from sin;[20] providing gifts to churches, monasteries, and shrines;[21] participating in religious processions;[22] attending church services (which often only increased the spread of disease);[23] and killing Jews and witches (since it was thought Satan used them as his agents in causing illness).[24] Religious leaders largely ignored the possibility of physical causes and cures of diseases.[25]

Science Bests Supernaturalism

White states that despite all the prayers, rituals, and other religious activities performed throughout the centuries, the frequency and severity of plagues did not diminish until scientific hygiene made its appearance. In regard to the hygienic improvements instituted during the second half of the nineteenth century, White explains: "[T]he sanitary authorities have in half a century done far more to reduce the rate of disease and death than has been done in fifteen hundred years by all the fetiches which theological reasoning could devise or ecclesiastical power enforce."[26]

The superior results of using science instead of religion can be seen in many other fields. Humanists therefore accept the scientific view that this world operates under unvarying natural laws that cannot be suspended by religious rituals or other means.

And Humanists esteem highly those who study this world and provide a better understanding of it. Unlike the theologians who focus on influencing supposed supernatural powers, persons using a scientific outlook have enabled great progress to be made in reducing misery and increasing happiness.

Incorrect Ideas About the Structure of the Physical World

Humanists also repudiate the Bible because of its mistaken ideas about the structure of the physical world. As is the case with the Bible's statements opposing the laws of nature, the book's views on this subject are similar to beliefs held by primitive and illiterate people throughout history.

Stationary Earth as the Center of the Universe

An erroneous Bible teaching caused Christian theologians to oppose Galileo's proof that the earth rotates on its axis and revolves around the sun. In the sixteenth century, Copernicus proposed this theory about the double motion of the earth. In the following century, Galileo's telescope proved that Copernicus had been right.

To oppose the Copernican doctrine and show that the earth remains stationary while the sun moves around it, the Catholic Church pointed to the tenth chapter of the book of Joshua.[27] There we are told that Joshua, in order to have a longer period of daylight in which to carry out the Lord's command to slaughter the Amorites, ordered the sun to stand still – not the earth.

Other passages demonstrating that the earth remains stationary include Psalm 93:1 ("The world is [e]stablished, that it cannot be moved."); I Chronicles 16:30 ("[T]he world also shall be stable, that it be not moved."); and Psalm 104:5 (The Lord "laid the foundations of the earth, that it should not be removed forever.").

Because of Galileo's support for the Copernican doctrine, the Inquisition threatened him with torture, forced him to recant, and subjected him to imprisonment.[28] Additionally, for nearly 200 years the Catholic Church's Index of Forbidden Books condemned all writings that affirmed the double motion of the earth.[29]

Protestants weren't much better. For generations the major branches of Protestantism – Lutheran, Calvinist, and Anglican – denounced the Copernican doctrine as contrary to scripture.[30]

A Flat Earth Resting on Pillars

The Bible supports the primitive notion of a flat earth. In the sixth century, a Christian monk named Cosmas wrote a book, titled Topographia Christiana, describing the structure of the physical world. Basing his views on the Bible, Cosmas said the earth is flat and surrounded by four seas.[31]

The prophecy at Revelation 1:7 was a basis for his conclusion. It states that when Christ returns, "every eye shall see him." Cosmas reasoned that if the earth were round, people on the other side would not see Christ's second coming.[32]

Further support for the idea of a flat earth is contained in the verses mentioning the "four corners of the earth" (e.g., Isaiah 11:12; Revelation 7:1) and the "ends of the earth" (e.g., Jeremiah 16:19; Acts 13:47).

Because of such Bible teachings, most of the early church fathers thought the earth is flat.[33] In fact, the view of the world contained in Cosmas' book was accepted for several centuries as orthodox Christian doctrine.[34] Even in the fifteenth century, when Christopher Columbus proposed to sail west from Spain to reach the East Indies, the biblical notion of a flat earth was a major source of opposition to him.[35]

As for the question of what holds the flat earth in place, the Bible indicates the answer is "pillars." The pillars of the earth are mentioned in several verses in the Old Testament (I Samuel 2:8; Psalm 75:3; Job 9:6). These verses reflect the belief of the ancient Hebrews that the earth rests upon pillars.[36]

Sky a Solid Dome Containing Windows

The Bible promotes the idea that the sky is a solid dome covering the earth. In the creation account given in the first chapter of Genesis, verse 17 says the Lord set the sun and moon "in the firmament" to provide light for the earth. The Hebrew word translated as firmament is raqia, which means "hammered metal."[37]

More support for the notion of a domed earth is found at Job 37:18 (where the sky is described as like a "molten lookingglass"); Isaiah 40:22 (God "stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in"); and Revelation 6:14 ("And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together.").

This concept of the sky was common in the ancient Near East and taken for granted by the Bible writers.[38] Based on the Bible, most of the early church fathers accepted the notion of the firmament.[39] The same position was supported by Cosmas, and thus was part of orthodox Christian doctrine for several centuries.[40]

Orthodox doctrine also contained the related idea that the firmament has windows – which are opened by angels when God wants to send rain upon the earth. Cosmas believed that when the windows are opened, some of the waters contained above the firmament (which are mentioned at Genesis 1:17) fall to the earth. Cosmas' basis for this belief was the statement, at Genesis 7:11-12, that at the time of the Noachian flood the "windows of heaven were opened" and the rain fell.[41]

Supernatural Signs in the Heavens

Bible stories led the Christian world to believe – for centuries – that God sends humankind signs in the heavens.

Christians thought comets warn of divine anger and imminent punishment;[42] stars and meteors portend beneficial events such as the birth of heroes and great men;[43] eclipses signify divine distress in response to events on earth;[44] and storms and other destructive weather result from the anger of God or the malice of Satan.[45]

Additional Errors About the Physical World

The Bible has verses mentioning dragons (Jeremiah 51:34), unicorns (Isaiah 34:7), and cockatrices (Isaiah 11:8). These passages led many naturalists in the Middle Ages to think such mythical creatures actually exist.[46]

The Bible is also incorrect in saying the bat is a bird (Leviticus 11:13,19), the hare and rock badger chew the cud (Leviticus 11:5-6), and the mustard seed "is the smallest of all seeds" (Matthew 13:32).

Finally, it's inconsistent with science – and ludicrous – to believe that God confounded the language of humans because he was afraid they would build a tower high enough to reach heaven (Genesis 11:1-9).

Overall Effect of Bible Science

White summarizes the historical results of relying on the Bible for answers about the physical world. It's not a pretty sight: "[T]here were developed, in every field, theological views of science which have never led to a single truth – which, without exception, have forced mankind away from the truth, and have caused Christendom to stumble for centuries into abysses of error and sorrow."[47]

In view of the Bible's numerous mistaken beliefs about the physical world, there's no reason to think its writers were any more correct about unseen and abstract matters. Being so greatly in error regarding the tangible and observable universe, the Bible cannot be considered a reliable guide for spiritual and ethical issues.

False Prophecies

Prophecies in the Bible further strengthen the Humanist view. Because many of the prophecies turned out to be false, they prove the Bible is not inerrant.

The Bible itself contains a test for determining whether a prophecy was inspired by God. Deuteronomy 18:22 explains: "When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him."

Applying this test to the Bible leads to one conclusion: the book contains many statements that were not inspired by God.

Old Testament Prophecies

Genesis 2:17 says the Lord warned Adam and Eve about the fruit contained on the tree of knowledge. He stated: "[I]n the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." According to Genesis chapter 3, however, Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit and didn't die on that day.

Genesis 35:10 claims that God told Jacob: "[T]hy name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name. . . ." But 11 chapters later, the Lord's own act proved his prediction to be wrong. Genesis 46:2 relates: "God spake unto Israel in the visions of the night, and said, Jacob, Jacob. And he said, Here am I."

At II Chronicles 1:12, God promised Solomon: "Wisdom and knowledge is granted unto thee; and I will give thee riches, and wealth, and honour, such as none of the kings have had that have been before thee, neither shall there any after thee have the like."

As Robert Ingersoll pointed out in the nineteenth century, there were several kings in Solomon's day who could have thrown away the value of Palestine without missing the amount.[48] And the wealth of Solomon has been exceeded by many later kings and is small by today's standards.[49]

Isaiah 17:1-2 prophesies that Damascus would cease to be a city, become a heap of ruins, and remain forever desolate. Yet some 27 centuries after the prediction was made, Damascus is one of the oldest cities in the world and is still going strong.

Jeremiah 25:11 predicts the Jews would be captives in Babylon for 70 years, and II Chronicles 36:20-21 views the prophecy as fulfilled. But the Jews were taken into captivity by the Chaldeans when Jerusalem fell in 586 B.C.E. And Cyrus of Persia issued an order in 538 B.C.E. allowing them to return from Babylon to Judah. Thus, the Babylonian captivity lasted about 48 years.[50]

Examples of other unfulfilled Old Testament prophecies include the following: the Jews will occupy the land from the Nile to the Euphrates (Genesis 15:18); they shall never lose their land and shall be disturbed no more (II Samuel 7:10); King David's throne and kingdom shall be established forever (II Samuel 7:16); no uncircumcised person will ever enter Jerusalem (Isaiah 52:1); and the waters of Egypt will dry up (Isaiah 19:5-7).

New Testament Prophecies

In applying the Bible's test for identifying false prophets, the conclusion is inescapable that Jesus was one of them. For example, he was wrong in predicting the world would end within the lifetime of his followers.

At Matthew 16:28, Jesus tells his disciples: "There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom." The people who were standing there all died eventually, and they never saw Jesus return to establish a kingdom.

Similarly, Jesus is depicted at Mark 13:24-30 as listing signs that shall accompany the end of the world. These include the sun becoming darkened, the moon not giving any light, the stars of heaven falling, the son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory, and angels gathering the elect. Then Jesus announces: "Verily I say unto you, that this generation shall not pass, till all these things be done." His generation passed away long ago without the predicted events occurring.

Jesus also erred in predicting the amount of time he would be in the tomb. At Matthew 12:40 he teaches: "For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." Mark 15:42-45 shows that Jesus died on a Friday afternoon. But Mark 16:9 and Matthew 28:1 tell us he left the tomb sometime on Saturday night or Sunday morning. Either way, the amount of time was less than three nights.

Another significant false prophecy is at John 14:13-14. Jesus promises: "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye ask any thing in my name, I will do it." Everyone knows there have been millions of instances where Jesus failed to respond to Christians who asked for things in his name. And the graveyards are full of people who prayed to him for health.

As is the case with other incorrect statements in the Bible, false prophecies cast doubt on all biblical claims. If one verse in the Bible is wrong, it's possible for many verses to be wrong.

Inaccurate Statements About History

The Bible's false statements about history also bolster the Humanist position. Historians and other scholars have exposed many of the Bible's claims as historically inaccurate.

History and the Old Testament

Historians have long known that the biblical story of a worldwide flood is a myth. For instance, Andrew White says nineteenth-century Egyptologists found that Egypt had a flourishing civilization long before Noah, and no flood had ever interrupted it.[51]

The book of Exodus claims to contain a historical record of the escape of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. But historians and archaeologists have been unable to verify any of the events described in the book. No known Egyptian records refer to the biblical Moses, the devastating plagues God supposedly inflicted on the country, the escape of the Hebrew slaves, or the drowning of the Egyptian army.[52] Further, White tells us the records contained on Egyptian monuments show that the pharaoh ruling at the time of the alleged escape of the Jews was certainly not overwhelmed in the Red Sea.[53]

The book of Esther purports to describe how a young Jewish girl named Esther was chosen by the Persian king Xerxes I to be queen after he had divorced Vashti. Although historians know a great deal about Xerxes I, there is no record that he had a Jewish queen named Esther or was married to Vashti.[54]

Additionally, the book of Esther describes the Persian empire as having 127 provinces, but historians maintain there was no such division of the empire.[55] Also contrary to the book of Esther, historians assure us Xerxes did not order Jews in his territories to attack his Persian subjects.[56]

The book of Daniel describes events that supposedly happened during the Babylonian captivity of the Jews. The fifth chapter states that Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king, was succeeded on the throne by his son Belshazzar. But historians tell us Belshazzar was not the son of Nebuchadnezzar and was never king.[57]

The book of Daniel also says one "Darius the Mede" captured Babylon in the sixth century B.C.E. In contrast, historians know that Cyrus of Persia took Babylon.[58]

History and the New Testament

In the New Testament, the second chapter of Luke asserts that shortly before the birth of Jesus, the emperor Augustus ordered a census throughout the Roman world. Luke claims that every person had to travel to the town of his ancestors for the census to be taken. He identifies the census as the reason for Joseph and Mary traveling from Nazareth to Bethlehem, where Jesus is said to have been born.

In his book Gospel Fictions, Randall Helms says this type of census was never taken in the history of the Roman Empire. He points out it's ridiculous to think the practical Romans would require millions of people to travel enormous distances – to towns of long-deceased ancestors – merely to sign a tax form.[59] Likewise, in Asimov's Guide to the Bible, Isaac Asimov affirms that the Romans would certainly arrange no such census.[60]

The third chapter of Luke contains a genealogy tracing Christ's ancestry back only 76 generations to Adam. According to Genesis chapter 1, Adam was created along with the rest of the universe during the course of one week.

The Bible thus views the human race and the universe as having existed for a relatively short period, probably no more than several thousand years. In fact, for many centuries the orthodox Christian position – to doubt which was to risk damnation – was that the creation took place sometime between four and six thousand years before Christ's birth.[61]

Historians and scientists give a much longer historical record. They say the universe is between 10 and 20 billion years old,[62] the earth's age is approximately 4.6 billion years,[63] and humans evolved from ape-like ancestors during the last few million years.[64]

Matthew chapter 2 avers that shortly after the birth of Jesus, King Herod ordered the massacre of all male children two years of age or under in Bethlehem and its vicinity. In the book of Luke, which contains the only other New Testament story of Jesus' birth, there is no mention of this horribly cruel order. It's also not recorded in any secular histories from the time – not even by writers who carefully described many far less wicked deeds of Herod.[65] The lack of corroboration means Matthew's account was fabricated.

Matthew 27:45 alleges that while Jesus was on the cross, there fell over the whole land a darkness lasting from midday until three in the afternoon. Andrew White explains that although Romans such as Seneca and Pliny carefully described much less striking occurrences of the same sort in more remote regions, they failed to note any such darkness occurring even in Judea.[66]

Robert Ingersoll wondered why the first-century Jewish historian Josephus, "the best historian the Hebrews produced, said nothing about the life or death of Christ; nothing about the massacre of the infants by Herod; not one word about the wonderful star that visited the sky at the birth of Christ; nothing about the darkness that fell upon the world for several hours in the midst of day; and failed entirely to mention that hundreds of graves were opened, and that multitudes of Jews rose from the dead, and visited the Holy City?" Ingersoll also asked, "Is it not wonderful that no historian ever mentioned any of these prodigies?"[67]

Ingersoll's questions are even more forceful when one considers that there still exist at least some of the works of more than 60 historians or chroniclers who lived in the period from 10 C.E. to 100 C.E.[68] Those writers were contemporaries of Jesus, if in fact he ever lived.

Finally, the previously discussed contradictions can be cited as examples of historical inaccuracies. In each instance where the Bible contains a contradiction about an alleged historical event, at least one of the accounts is wrong.

The Bible writers were poor historians, let alone conveyers of messages from an infallible God.

Other Problems with the Bible

There are other reasons why the Bible should not be considered the word of God. They include, but are not limited to: the fact that we don't know who wrote most of it;[69] the fact that much of it was written many years – and in some cases many centuries – after the events it purports to describe;[70] its obscene passages; and its promises of eternal rewards for the ignorant and credulous and everlasting punishment for skeptics and investigators.

Finally, the harm that the Bible causes in people's personal lives should be mentioned as a reason for rejecting the book. It's not uncommon to see media reports about Bible believers committing bizarre, injurious, and sometimes deadly acts.

Some people use Bible verses to justify beating children, withholding medical treatment, handling snakes, drinking poison, chopping off body parts, plucking out eyes, driving out demons, withdrawing from the affairs of this world, renouncing the pleasures of life, and expecting the world to end.

If the Bible were not viewed as God's word, these acts would occur much less often.

Conclusion

Many compelling and morally sound reasons support the Humanist position that the Bible is not divinely inspired. Instead of being inerrant, the Bible has far more errors and immoral teachings than most other books.

By treating this mistake-ridden book as the word of God, humanity has been led down many paths of error and misery throughout history. In too many ways, the Bible continues to produce such results.

But in some cases, the errors caused by the Bible have been corrected and the harms have been stopped. This happened when a scientific approach was applied to problems. Science involves relying on reason, observation, experience, and compassion – rather than blindly accepting religious or secular dogma.

We should reject the views of those who say the Bible has infallible answers to today's problems. As Humanists know, science has proved to be a much better source for answers.

Endnotes:

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8 Matthew 28:2 (outside) vs. Mark 16:5; Luke 24:3-4; and John 20:11-12 (inside)

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10 Matthew 28:9 and John 20:14

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